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November 21, 2019

The Hon. Benjamin S. Carson
Secretary
Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street S.W.
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Secretary Carson:

I write following disturbing reports of unacceptable housing conditions in the St. Louis region. For years, residents in the region have had to put up with conditions ranging from significant rodent infestations, to mold, to broken furnaces that leave residents with no source of heat during winter. These conditions are widespread and persistent. As Attorney General of Missouri, for example, I brought a lawsuit against a management company following reports that nearly half the units in a complex it managed were infested with rodents.¹

Recent reports suggest that these housing problems have not only remained—they have become worse. These news stories report that large companies managing housing complexes for predominantly low-income Missourians are failing to maintain units in habitable conditions, illegally evicting tenants,² and requiring tenants to procure costly repairs at their own expense, even though making those repairs is the landlord's responsibility.³ Conditions have become so bad that the City of St. Louis had to make illegal evictions—already prohibited under civil law—a criminal offense.⁴ Recently, the Housing Authority of St. Louis County has ended Section 8 eligibility for at least one large housing company, TEH Realty, for the company's "repeated failure as landlords."⁵

Conditions may be even worse than what these reports suggest. When some landlords neglect their duties, tenants often will not bring complaints. Eviction is a cause, and not just a symptom, of

¹ https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/lawsuit-settled-over-mice-infested-apartments-in-st-louis-public/article_3373efab-3d77-5dd9-82c9-552c90ecd325.html

² https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/columns/tony-messenger/messenger-rogue-landlord-in-st-louis-county-threatens--hour/article_530b2d11-b7bd-56ff-ab99-bc9bcd20b0d5.html

³ https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/columns/tony-messenger/messenger-bridgeton-takes-rogue-landlord-to-court-over-failure-to/article_b625813a-4b40-58d4-8673-a1d3756f3d50.html

⁴ https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/columns/tony-messenger/messenger-rogue-landlord-in-st-louis-county-threatens--hour/article_530b2d11-b7bd-56ff-ab99-bc9bcd20b0d5.html

⁵ https://www.stltoday.com/news/local/metro/st-louis-county-housing-officials-sever-ties-with-t-e/article_da5059aa-210b-5632-a40f-2ef7edb8199e.html

poverty. And many of these tenants fear that, if they raise complaints, a landlord will evict them, either illegally or pretextually over a small-scale infraction.

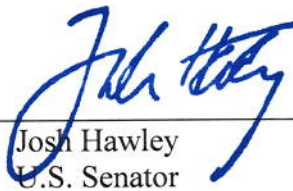
These reports of housing conditions in the St. Louis region warrant a thorough investigation by your agency. The Department of Housing and Urban Development ("HUD") provides critical housing resources to the landlords of millions of Americans. But HUD provides those resources for the benefit of the tenants, and taxpayer dollars should not go to landlords who do not provide even basic levels of acceptable housing. I ask that HUD conduct a thorough investigation of publicly managed housing complexes and landlords receiving federal funds in the St. Louis region, including Section 8 funding, who are failing to meet their obligations to provide quality housing.

At the same time, HUD should not cut off funding from bad property management companies without providing reciprocal support to the tenants harmed by those facilities. The Department must not compound harm to low-income residents by terminating relationships with bad management companies in a way that would risk making residents even worse off.

I therefore ask HUD to work with local housing authorities to ensure that residents who are affected by bad management companies receive all interim relief to which they are entitled, including Tenant Protection Vouchers and Enhanced Vouchers. Providing these benefits would enable residents to obtain adequate housing with minimal disruption and with the opportunity to stay in their communities.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this important issue.

Sincerely,



Josh Hawley
U.S. Senator